

E. B. Crocker Art Gallery
"O" and 3rd Street
Sacramento, Sacramento Co.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

CAL-1885

CROCKER ART GALLERY

Sacramento, Sacramento County, California

ADDRESS: Home of Judge and Mrs. E. B. Crocker at Southwest corner of 3rd and "O" Streets; Adjacent Art Gallery now at 216 "O" Street; House listed as "Property of Mrs. E. B. Crocker" at Northwest corner of 3rd and "P" Streets (now destroyed).

OWNER: City of Sacramento (The Home of Judge and Mrs. E. B. Crocker now is an "Annex" of the Art Gallery).

OCCUPANT: Municipal Art Collection of Sacramento.

USE: Gallery

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The two buildings now called the Crocker Art Gallery and Annex are a fascinating palimpsest of the social and architectural history of later 19th century Sacramento, consisting of the original Art Gallery (a general entertainment center for the E. B. Crocker family before its donation to the city in 1885), the revised shell of the Judge and Mrs. E. B. Crocker Home (now called the Annex) and connecting passageways. This enclave of art and local society reflects the changing character of American aesthetics on a personal and municipal level. The now destroyed house, "Property of Mrs. E. B. Crocker", was never an integral part of the group, but it must have played a part in the social scene. The architectural distinction of parts of the group is high; the Art Gallery proper is one of the finest Italianate (Mannerist Italian Villa) 19th century structures in the United States. The revisions to the Judge and Mrs. E. B. Crocker home have destroyed its architectural integrity, but old photographs and prints suggest its qualities; the "Property of Mrs. E. B. Crocker" was a major example of Second Empire style in California, and was comparable in size and importance to the Gallatin Mansion in Sacramento (now the Governor's Mansion), being by the same architect.

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HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

The history of the group begins in the 1850's, when B.F. Hastings, pioneer banker and businessman of Sacramento built a home at the southwest corner of 3rd and O Streets. No clear historical or graphic information has yet been traced about this residence as it was originally built; the house is traditionally dated to 1852 or 1853 (certainly after the fire of November, 1852), when the B.F. Hastings commercial building at the southwest corner of 2nd and J Streets was also rebuilt more solidly. Inference suggests that it may have been a youthful work of Seth Babson of Maine (arrived in California 1850), born 1828; he was busy in the late 1850's with the Fogus (now Stanford) house. The Hastings house was apparently quite classical (if one judges from the unrevised service wing to the west of the house, appearing in old photographs of the Hastings-Crocker house) and would accord with the New England training of Babson as well as the obvious classicist, late Georgian undercurrent in his more fashionable Fogus-Stanford house of 1857-58, where the 18th century qualities are expressed in Italianizing terms. Judge Edwin Bryant Crocker, brother of Charles Crocker, bought the Hastings house about 1868; a June 1st burglary is reported in the Sacramento Union of June 3rd, 1869--"theft from the residence of E.B. Crocker at 3rd and O" with the loss of "considerable silverware and a watch"--inferring that the E.B. Crockers had been well settled by this date in their new residence. (E.B. Crocker was born in New York State in 1818 and arrived in Sacramento in 1852, where he practiced the profession of lawyer begun earlier in Indiana. He was associated with the early stages of the Central Pacific Railway. During Leland Stanford's term as Governor of California--January 10, 1862 to December 9, 1863, E.B. Crocker was appointed to the State Supreme Court, following the resignation of Chief Justice Fields. After the expiration of his term of office, Judge Crocker became chief counsel of the Central Pacific, and general agent. He suffered a paralytic stroke in June 1869, and retired from active service, becoming a member of the Board of Directors).

The former Hastings house was extensively revised (probably just before the Judge's stroke in June of 1869) by Seth Babson to suit the increased prosperity of the E.B. Crockers as the fortunes of the Central Pacific waxed ever greater. In 1870 the family went to Europe and Judge Crocker began the mass purchase of works of art which were finally assembled for exhibition in San Francisco in the fall of 1871. (The old master drawings were the most valuable single part of the Judge's European purchases; about one hundred are of major importance. The paintings were generally second rate works with major names, although the Judge and Mrs. Crocker later bought a few large California scenes of interest.) It was now

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thought advisable to build a special structure to properly show these "treasures" to Sacramento and at the same time provide a new center for the ambitions of Mrs. Crocker and her daughters. Land was purchased before 1870 from several owners, to the west of the Hastings-Crocker house, creating a half block property on "O" between 2nd and 3rd, and reaching to an alley dividing the block at the south. Here, just about fifteen feet west of the service wing of the house (which had apparently never been revised by Babson in 1869), the Art Gallery was erected at a cost variously cited as \$185,000 or \$285,000 (the former seems to come from a more reliable source: the magazine "Themis", unless it is typographical error there). Construction was probably begun early in 1872 and the building was completed in 1873. William Davis, a Welshman, was supervisor of construction; John Coffey (related to the infamous Michael Coffey?) is said to have designed the double stair. The art collections (seven hundred paintings and one thousand drawings) had been brought to Sacramento in April of 1873; an old photograph at the Crocker Gallery shows the collection hung in what is now the picture gallery proper, but with a temporary wooden floor, and no opening into the ballroom below--suggesting that the building was not quite completed when the collections arrived in the late spring of 1873, but that provision was immediately made for a temporary exhibition.

The Art Gallery itself was a polite pretext for the social enthusiasms of the ladies in the family; although a superb library and storage room for the master drawings was built south of the ballroom (the viewing racks for the drawings are still preserved in the basement today), the main reason of the "Gallery" was the magnificent ballroom and the additional entertainment facilities on the floor below (now the basement), where a billiard room, two narrow bowling alleys and a large roller skating area (the storage cabinets for the skates are still to be seen on west walls of the temporary offices now partitioned into this space) were located--the alleys at the northeast side of the skating area. E. B. Crocker had married Mary Norton and had one daughter from this marriage; after Mary's death, he wed Margaret Rhodes, her friend, in 1852. There were five children, only two of whom survived beyond their twenties--Jennie Louise, later Mrs. Sloat Fassett, and Amy Isabella (Aimee), many times married. At this time in the 1870's there were four girls of eligible age in the family, two of whom were to die soon after. Judge Crocker himself did not live to enjoy these costly enrichments of his cultural life; his death on June 24th, 1875 came only two years after the Art Gallery was finished.

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At some still unknown time, another quarter block (or more) of land was acquired by the family---beyond the alley of their original half block, so that Mrs. Crocker now owned at least three quarters and possibly all of the block between 2nd and 3rd and O and P. On the northwest corner of 3rd and P, directly south of the Hastings-Crocker house, Mrs. Crocker apparently had a large new residence built, after designs (still preserved) by Nathaniel Goodell, who had just finished the Gallatin house (1877-78). Little or nothing is known about this house. It appears in Thompson and West's History of Sacramento County of 1880 as "Property of Mrs. E. B. Crocker", distinguishing it from the house bought by the Judge and called here "Residence of Mrs. E. B. Crocker". Was this Goodell designed house ever really built, or was the Thompson and West view based on the architect's renderings? (The Thompson and West print reverses Goodell's facade from left to right). If it were built, when was it dismantled? It is possible that personal associations with the older house at 3rd and O caused Mrs. Crocker to try living in a wholly new residence after the Judge's death. It seems inconceivable as a rental property, in terms of its very considerable size and ornamental splendor. It is also possible that the increased use of the Art Gallery entertainment center made the older house a kind of super-service wing in toto, or that it was given over to the living quarters of the four girls. Photographs of the older house after its representation in Thompson and West of 1880 reveal that changes to this residence did not cease with the plans for a new house; a special wooden bay with separate mansard roof projects from the northwest corner of the older house in photographs of 1885 and 1886. This may have given a better view from the old parlors to the river (the Art Gallery blocked the direct view to the west), or it may have coincided with some special event such as a wedding. (An old photograph shows the rooms decorated for such a wedding reception, in this general area of the house). During the 1880's, however, Mrs. Crocker devoted herself increasingly, like many of her contemporaries including Jane Lathrop Stanford, to public and private charities. Money for a conservatory, for enlargement of a cemetery, for a pleasant large home for aged ladies---the Marguerite Home at 7th and Q, founded in 1884 and valued at \$30,000 with a \$62,000 endowment---indicate her growing preoccupation with good works. On March 21, 1885 Mrs. E. B. Crocker gave the Art Gallery to the City of Sacramento. The city expressed its municipal gratitude in the fantastic "Festival of Flowers" of May 6th, 1885, when floral and poetic tributes were tendered Margaret Crocker for her many good works. About 1887, Mrs. Crocker went east to Larchmont, New York, to be closer to her married daughters. (She died in 1901). The Judge and Mrs. E. B. Crocker's home, adjacent to the Art Gallery

was given to the Fairhaven Home for Girls (unwed mothers); later it was vacated and badly vandalized. It was acquired by the city in 1911, partially with money donated by Mrs. Sloat Fassett---the former Jennie Crocker (the total cost was \$20,000); Mrs. Fassett later gave \$25,000 as an endowment in 1928, along with her collection of oriental pottery. The city had spent about \$25,000 in 1922 to renovate the old house and make it into an Annex of the Gallery. The Crocker Art Gallery is the 2nd oldest municipally or state-owned art gallery in the United States and the oldest gallery west of the Rockies. The curators and directors have included W. F. Jackson, Harry Noyes Pratt, Don Birrell, Ernest Van Harlingen, and currently Frank Kent. The Gallery is open from 10 to 5 every day except Monday, without charge.

CROCKER

Supplemental Material and Sources

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ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

General

The Crocker Art Gallery staff has prepared a history of the buildings with numerous details of interior finish and the nature of the collections; unfortunately, some details of this mimeographed history are misleading. After study of old photographs and of the existing structures, the following aspects of construction should be noted:

The general chronology of this revision of a revision falls into definite periods. At the beginning was a fifty by sixty foot three story classicist brick and stucco house for B. F. Hastings, facing east at the southwest corner of 3rd and O Streets. It would appear that this residence had a one room deep service wing of two stories (with basement as a half story) at its western end, and that the whole was built after 1853, possibly by Seth Babson. Examination of the ground (basement) floor and its walls (the plaster is as much as one and a half inches thick on some surfaces) suggests that certain revisions took place, possibly from the floor timbering up and certainly in relation to the original basement openings. Great 4 x 12 and 2 x 12 inch joists, fifty feet long (the entire width of the house) span the area under first floor (main living floor with parlors, etc.). It is almost impossible to tell whether Seth Babson modified the entire structure of the Hastings house when he acceded to the Crockers' desire for an Italianate residence, or whether he merely sheathed the older house in new decor. One story verandahs were added to the east and northern sides, obviously built of wood (fir or redwood?) with the same tall mannerist proportions that are apparent in the house proper; and beneath each verandah were arched openings in the brick basement walls, giving onto the basement interior. The new Crocker house had the mastic (plaster) surface with quoined corners

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which Babson had used on the Fogus (later Stanford) house of 1857-58. Pedimented windows---the pediments on consoles---in the main story, and "pushed-up" cornices above the second story windows suggest the direct influence of sources such as Michelangelo's New Sacristy for San Lorenzo in Florence. A wooden cornice with modillions (verging on brackets) and a hipped roof with square balustrade at the top continued the basically Georgian massing of Babson's early work on the Stanford house (Fogus originally) and possibly on the Hastings house here (if he were the architect). The general effect is to reiterate Babson's affinities stylistically with the 16th and 18th century rather than with the Victorian eclecticism of his own time.

All the while, the service wing at the west of the Hastings house had been apparently almost untouched; it still retained its classical revival (almost Georgian) appearance in old photographs of the 70's, 80's, and 90's, and its floor levels appeared to have ill-corresponded with the revised Hastings house, although the main floor was regularized to allow the family diningroom to be in the service wing, with a hall between diningroom and the two northern parlors of the house proper. The view of Sacramento in 1870, published by Britton and Rey, shows this revised house with its service wing. The remarkable accuracy of these general views, despite their relative lack of scale, suggests that on the south side of the service wing there were two balconies or verandahs (overlooking the garden of the structures), and on the west side of the house adjacent, there was one balcony. A bay projects from the south side of the house proper---perhaps the first stage of a conservatory which later is mentioned so often. Examination of the ground floor indicates that the south wall of the service wing and the adjacent west wall of the house were exterior walls (weathered plaster) now enclosed in the modernized "Annex". Whether this sheltered southwest angle of the buildings was ever enclosed up to 1885 is problematic; it would appear not from the ground floor, as the enclosing brick work seems to be of the 20th century, dating probably from 1922. The original bricks are 4" x 8", laid in irregular bond: five or six rows of stretchers and a row of headers, etc. In any study of the present first or main floor, changes of window openings since 1922 confuse structure; one particular puzzle is an area in the basement of the service wing, near the house, where there seem to be exterior walls inside the wing and beneath the hall area, plus traces of a stair. The extra bay at the northwest corner of the house, and its mansard with square balustrade dates to the early 80's as suggested in the Historical Information.

When the Crockers returned from Europe they began plans for the new Art Gallery and entertainment center. Babson was again the architect, with Davis as his supervisor, especially in charge of woodwork. The structure that was erected between 1871 and 1873 was of 3 stories, 62 by 122 feet. The walls were of brick, thirty inches at the base tapering to twenty-four inches above the main floor, with an air space between the double wall. A study of the ground floor suggests that there was no connecting link between Gallery and service wing of the house originally, but Thompson and West's print of 1880 has such a passageway, so it must have been constructed during the later 1870's.

Mrs. E. B. Crocker's home at 3rd and P (called "Property of Mrs. E. B. Crocker") was built by Nathaniel Dudley Goodell (with whom Babson was sometimes associated) after 1875 possibly about 1879, just after he did the Gallatin house at 16th and H; the architect's drawings of the elevations are among the finest architectural renderings of the period.

Exterior

The exterior of the Crocker Art Gallery is stylistically related to the Babson work on the Hastings house. It shows again Babson's fondness for the Mannerist 16th century Italian formal sources, and is designed with a dignity and assurance that are startling in 19th century Sacramento. The salient central section of the facade is related to the Baroque emphasis of the contemporary Capitol building (1861-74, by a variety of architects); however, the strong, classicist pediment at the top gives a purist flavor to this otherwise Mannered Baroque design. The quoins are obviously Renaissance or Georgian in inspiration and the windows, with pediments on consoles in the first story and pushed-up cornices in the second (plus a broken pediment or cornice in the center) echo exactly the Michelangesque character of the house's ornamental detail; the porch with its fading Gothic flattened arch in the center is virtually a copy of the eastern porch of the house. The details, the materials (brick and mastic wall surfaces, granite and iron sills, the wooden porch, and the wooden cornices, with cast lead ornamental details) are the same as Babson's slightly earlier work in revising the Hastings' house, yet the aggressive but tempered Baroque projection of center of the northern facade, and the extraordinary finesse of the western side of the building with blind niches and tall windows (north and south, five bays; west and east, seven bays, although actual openings vary from level to level and side and side), hovering between Mannerist ambiguity and Baroque decision, reveal Babson as a remarkably sophisticated American architect here more completely master of his total effect than in a revision (as in the house).

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Cast iron shutters, folding into the thickness of the wall, cover each window. The mastic surface was originally painted to allow contrast of walls and ornamental detail; it now is a uniform rose-gray. Condition of all exterior surfaces is excellent; no important losses are apparent on any wall, although a few of the cast lead bases on the console-modillions of the main cornice have fallen off. The roof was of slate and two freight car loads were used to make it. The cast iron cresting and chimneys have been removed. A fire escape is on east wall.

The exterior of the former Judge E. B. Crocker house is a neutral plaster envelope, with a few feeble Mannerist and Greek classicist details, mirroring the old house exterior. Although the complete lack of architectural character of this "Annex", as seen today, serves to enhance the brilliant design of the Art Gallery, there is a lack of total relationship which is unfortunate.

INTERIOR

The mimeographed history of the Gallery, prepared by the staff, contains the following information: "At the time of its construction, the building was believed to be fireproof. It is now protected by an elaborate system of automatic fire detectors as well as automatic sprinklers in the packing room. There are three floors, the basement, the main floor, and the upper floor, of which the main floor is the most elaborate.

"The main floor includes the vestibules, the ballroom and the Library, as well as subordinate halls, an office, and a parlor that is now used by the director as an office and study. The vestibule, which is entered from the front porch, owes its elegance to the richness of the woodwork, to the curved staircases on either side, to the elaborate tiled floor and particularly to the vista through the ballroom into the library. The woods used are black walnut, mahogany from Honduras, some bird's-eye maple, and laurel relieved by myrtle, a rare wood which is found in the Holy Land and in Oregon. The quality of the cabinet work of the doors (said to have cost \$1300.00 each) and staircases is due to the long apprenticeship required of the craftsmen that were hired by Mr. Crocker. The heavy brass on the stair trends, elaborately decorated by patterns of nailheads, suggests that Judge Crocker employed marine technicians. Unfortunately, no records remain. The walls and ceiling of the vestibule were richly frescoed. The tiles were imported from Stoke on Trent, England.

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"Between the vestibule and the ballroom is a small hallway in which are hung the portraits of Mrs. E. B. Crocker, who donated the Gallery to the City of Sacramento in 1885, and that of her daughter, Jennie Crocker Fassett. Mrs. Fassett has added many of her treasures to the Gallery collections. One of the interesting details in the hallway is the deep red fresco, which was the original color of the ballroom. The doors between the hallway and the ballroom, as well as those into the library are remarkable examples of fine cabinet work and beautiful woods. It was said that 'those doors alone cost enough to build what would be considered a desirable residence by a person of moderate means'. The hinges are covered by a decorative brass plate.

"The ballroom is the most picturesque room in the building. The contrast of the blue Corinthian columns and pilasters against the rich woodwork and the delicate walls is an outstanding decorative effect. While originally the walls were frescoed, a deep red ornamented with gold, recently they have been covered with a silvery silk textile. The floors are an elaborate parquetry of Spanish cedar and white fir. As the present floor is the second, one may speculate that the first was worn out in dancing the square dances which were so popular in the seventies and so admirably suited to the ballroom. The ceiling which vies with the floor for attention is cleverly designed, and elaborately decorated and frescoed. The light well was an afterthought, added soon after the construction of the building. Electric lights replace the gas lamps originally installed. The cabinets and niches on the south wall were used to display the objects of art collected by Mrs. Crocker. At the time of the presentation of the Gallery to the City, the ballroom was used as a museum, and later Mr. W. F. Jackson, the first curator, used it for his art classes. It is now used for receptions, teas and concerts.

"The library is preserved almost as it was originally except that the walls have been covered by monk's cloth to form a suitable background for pictures. The elegant bookcases are said to have cost more than \$3,000.00 in the days when cabinetmakers received but a few dollars a day. The tiling of the floor is similar to that of the vestibule. The mantle-piece was evidently added at a later date because it is different in motif and cuts across earlier panels. It may be observed that the tiling belongs to a later decade (only one fireplace in the Gallery).

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"The upper floor of the building was planned for the exhibition of paintings.

"The vestibule at the head of the staircases carried the decorative features of the lower vestibule to the upper story. The domed ceiling and the skylight add to the decorative effect of the tiled floors, frescoed walls, and rich woodwork.

"The main gallery is thirty feet wide by seventy-two feet long. Beside the elegant doors the only decorative feature is the large well which lights the ballroom. The floating ceiling beneath the skylight was a usual feature in galleries of the Late Victorian period. The electric lighting which has been installed in recent years has been carefully planned by experts.

"Formerly from the pipe line, used as a support for pictures, to the wainscoting, the walls were covered with pictures as closely spaced as the patches in a crazy quilt. Now, the walls are covered with monk's cloth. (The Victorian hanging was recreated c. 1952 by Don Birell: Baird.)

"On either side of the main gallery are long galleries that were joined by a narrow gallery at the rear, forming a large U-shaped gallery. The rear section of this gallery has now been converted into a storeroom. (Pine woodwork, grained to imitate mahogany; pine and fir beams, with plaster pieces between floor joists for insulation).

"The basement was formerly used for recreation. It contained a billiard room, a skating rink and bowling alleys (hard grained wood). At the rear of the building was a furnace room and a laundry. The basement is now used for storage, a shipping room, and workshop. A gas furnace which supplies low-pressure steam for the radiators replaces the earlier furnace, which--in its day--was considered very modern. A vault was built in the basement at the opening of the Second World War. In it were stored the finest of the paintings and the drawings."

The former home, now the "Annex", contained six chimneys, with fireplaces at various levels (five chimneys in house proper; one in service wing); the filling of openings on the ground floor dates after 1922. Again the mimeographed history has the important details: "The house had a hallway along the major axis of the building. The hall was divided, the front hall being separated

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from the rear hall by a pair of Corinthian columns, which are still in place. As is shown by marks in the plaster, the staircase which led to the second floor, was on the south side of the rear hall. At the end of the hallway was the covered porch which was used as a greenhouse for exotic plants. The hall was elegantly but simply furnished, and fine paintings hung on its walls.

"As was commonly found in the mansions of those days, the living rooms were on the right side of the hallway (the northern side). There were two parlors and behind them (a hall and a) dining room. The walls of the living room were handsomely decorated with frescoed panels, liberally ornamented by gold leaf, and separated occasionally by long mirrors such as are found in the gallery today. From the center of the ceiling, which was decorated with frescoed moldings, hung a crystal chandelier. Beyond the second or rear parlor was (a hall and) the dining room. Among the furnishings of the dining room were sideboards, really a safe for Judge Crocker's business papers, and the *etagere*. At present, the old dining room contains many pieces of furniture and bric-a-brac which belonged to the Crocker family. The dining room was connected with the kitchen in the basement by a dumb-waiter.

"On the south side of the hallway were Judge and Mrs. Crocker's bedrooms. Little is known of these rooms. As may be deduced from the pipes in the basement, a bathroom was added, probably outside the south wall of the building. The rear bedroom probably had a door and possibly a window opening onto the covered porch which was used as a hothouse.

"The basement was divided between the kitchen and the servants quarters. The tile (from Man and Co., Benthall Works, Brosely, Salop: Baird) which was taken from the basement indicates that the servants lived in luxury.

"The second floor was occupied by bedrooms, probably with sitting rooms between. The positions of these rooms can be determined by the mantel pieces, which are still in place. In reconstructing the building it was found that the old home had two roofs. The earlier roof was covered with a later more elegant one, probably excellent means of protecting the bedrooms from the heat of the sun.

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SITE

The Crocker Art Gallery is oriented to face north. The present entrance stair is a revision of the original, which had two flights (west and east) converging at a landing and then rising in a short flight to the main level; the granite steps and sides of the present stair are, however, of the late 19th century with revised iron balustrades. The cast iron fence set in granite blocks which surrounded the property still stands; the street fence is gone. Planting is not so lush now as in the 19th century.

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